

Beware of the Flu

This year's flu season may be deadlier than usual, and this year's flu vaccine is a relatively poor match to a new virus that is now circulating, according to federal health officials. The Centers for Disease Control has alerted doctors to the problem and has urged them to prescribe antiviral drugs like Tamiflu to vulnerable patients with flu symptoms without waiting for a positive flu test. Antivirals aren't a substitute for vaccination. But antivirals are an important second line of defense to treat the flu.

The flu is caused by lots of different strains of the flu virus. The bad news this year is that one of the nasty strains is showing up all over the place and it is called H3N2. Older people, people with other health problems and kids tend to get hit the hardest. In fact, at least five children have died this year from the flu.

Getting a vaccine, even if it doesn't provide as good protection as it was hoped for, would be more important than ever and remains the single most effective way to protect yourself against the flu. That's because the vaccine still protects against other flu strains that are circulating and may at least help fight off the mutated H3N2 viruses.

So, how do you know you have the flu virus?

A 100°F or higher fever or feeling feverish (not everyone with the flu has a fever).

A cough and/or sore throat.

A runny or stuffy nose.

Headaches and/or body aches.

Chills.

Fatigue.

Nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea (most common in children).

So what are ways to avoid the flu?

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- [Wash your hands](#) often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an [alcohol-based hand rub](#).
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs like the flu.